

Answering a business telephone

When you work in a business, be it an engineering workshop or an office environment, it is essential that you project a professional and positive image of the workplace. This is especially important if you answer the telephone as this is often the first contact a potential client will have with the business.

It is not good saying "I'm in the workshop so it's not important to me!"

Regardless of your role or duties within a workplace, at some point of time you will answer the telephone while at work. By answering the right way you project a positive tone, help the caller feel comfortable, set you up to help answer whatever questions he or she may have and possible be the way for new business to arrive.

Here are ten points to consider and follow when using the telephone at work.

Answer quickly

If you are in a business setting, it is rude to keep people waiting. Get to the phone and answer before the third ring.

Put the phone up to your face

While you want to move quickly when answering the phone, you should be patient enough to actually get the mouthpiece to your face. Make sure you don't start talking until the phone is right up against you so that the person on the other end doesn't miss any information.

Take a deep breath before answering

Once the phone is up to your face, take a deep breath before giving your introduction. This will help you keep calm and controlled, making it easier to speak slowly and collect your thoughts.

Introduce your business and yourself

You want to make sure the other person on the line has called the right place and person, so make sure they know who you and your company are. Make sure you lead with the business name. You may want to give yourself a scripted greeting so that you don't have to think about what to say when the phone rings. This message will change slightly depending on your circumstances.

If you are working in the office or are a receptionist, it is important that you identify the whole company, as you are the caller's gateway to whatever they need, e.g. *"Good morning, this is Pipewhat Enterprises, Ben speaking. How can I help you?"* This lets the caller know who you are and what the business is, as well as providing the caller with an opening to continue talking.

If you are part of an office, let the other person know what you do so they know what kinds of questions they can ask, e.g. *"Hello, this is Ben in Accounts"* lets the other person know if they have reached the office or person they want, and if they should talk to someone else.

Keep a pen and notepad near the phone

This will let you jot down information quickly if the person want to leave a message or give you other information. You don't want to keep your caller waiting while you search for something to write with.

Smile as you speak

Even if you aren't in a good mood, putting a smile on your face and faking it can help you sound more pleasant to the person on the other end. Believe it or not, taking on the physical characteristics of being happy actually impacts on your voice and general attitude!

Speak clearly and professionally

This is a professional setting, and it is important that both you and the other person understand each other clearly and precisely. Speak slowly and enunciate your words to make sure your information gets across.

Avoid slang words like "OK," "Deadly," "Sure," or "Nah." Use the correct words such as "Yes" and "No" so as to avoid confusion. Avoiding any confusion between you and the caller over what either person said is vital. Don't forget common polite phrases such as "Thank you" when appropriate.

If you need to give someone specific numbers or letters, say passing along a name or phone number, it can be good to familiarize yourself with the phonetic alphabet. Using the International Phonetic Alphabet ensures that there is no confusion over spelling of words.

Address the caller professionally

Use the person's title ("Mr. Allen") and not their first name, especially if you do not know the caller personally. Make sure you remember his name, and address him with it during the conversation.

It may be helpful to write down the person's name after you get it in order to help you remember.

Transfer the person if necessary

If someone is calling you at work, she probably has an issue she needs resolved. If you don't know how to answer a question or concern, don't try. Instead, offer to transfer her to someone who can help. This also shows that you are interested and willing to help solve your caller's problem.

Many workplace telephone systems will have a way to transfer calls. If your workplace has this arrangement, then make sure you know how it works. If there is no transfer system or it is not working then get the right person's number, and pass that information to your caller.

Be as polite as possible when doing this, and offer the transfer. Say something like *"I'm afraid I can't answer that. Would you like me to transfer you to Sarah, who may be able to help you?"* Make sure the person on the other end agrees before changing the call.

If someone else isn't available, offer to take a message. Just remember to pass that message along.

End the call professionally

A clear and polite *"Thank you"* or *"Good bye"* lets the other person know that the conversation has finished and she can hang up. There shouldn't be any confusion over whether or not the conversation should continue.

Let the other person hang up. She initiated the call, so you want to let her finish whatever she needed when she called in the first place. If you hang up when the caller isn't ready, it can appear rude, or you might miss important information.

Other tips

- Avoid answering your personal mobile phone at work. You are at your job to work, not chat with your friends. Personal calls and messages can wait until the working day is done. If you are waiting for an emergency call (e.g. A member of the family is in hospital and having an operation) then inform your supervisor of the need to answer the phone during that day.
- Avoid distractions when answering the workplace's phone. Put down what you are doing and focus on the phone call so that the caller has your undivided attention. You do not want to come across as distracted or too busy to answer questions and provide assistance.
- Keep things out of your mouth when on the phone. This means no eating, drinking, or chewing gum. A mouth full of anything destroys the clarity of your voice, suggests to the caller that they are not important and leaves the mouthpiece covered in whatever is in your mouth!.
- Be empathetic, and remain calm and professional even if a caller is complaining or rude.